

Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

15 June 2022

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 12 May in which you set out a series of outstanding questions from the evidence session I attended on 11 May, please find answers below.

Ukrainians entering the UK from the Republic of Ireland

You asked how Ukrainians entering the UK from the Republic of Ireland without a visa to the UK would be treated with regard to inadmissibility and potential relocation to Rwanda.

As I set out to the Committee, the UK Government has moved as quickly as possible to ensure those fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine can find safety in the UK without the need to embark on a dangerous journey here. Our two uncapped Ukraine schemes, Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Family Scheme have been one of the fastest and largest UK visa programmes in history with over 120,000 visas issued.

Ukrainians who want to come to the UK should make an online application to one of our two schemes and wait for the Home Office to confirm their application has been approved before travelling. This approach allows us to identify any security concerns as well as guard against those who may seek to take advantage of the situation and protect the security of the UK. We continue to streamline our processes where possible to ensure applications can be processed as quickly as possible.

Given the uncapped safe and legal routes available there should be no need for a Ukrainian to make dangerous or unnecessary journeys to seek asylum in the UK. Ukrainians who do arrive via dangerous or unnecessary routes and who claim asylum will be considered on a case-by-case basis in the same way as any other nationality who arrives in the UK in this way.

Returns agreements

You asked whether the UK had concluded any returns agreements since I last appeared before the Committee in November.

The UK has a well-established returns relationship with most returns destinations, and we look to improve our capability and cooperation through a mix of formal and informal returns agreements in order to tackle the drivers of irregular migration.

We continue to negotiate returns and readmissions agreements with many countries across the world, including those along key migratory routes, while continuing to protect existing arrangements. It is important to note that signing returns agreements does not guarantee improved returns cooperation, but it is sometimes useful to solidify cooperation or necessary to return individuals.

On 26 January, we signed a landmark agreement to return Serbian nationals who have no legal right to be in the UK. The agreement will mean quicker removals to Serbia and will help protect the UK's borders and communities, in line with the government's New Plan for Immigration.

On 24 February, we agreed an MoU with Nigeria which strengthens the migration partnership between our two countries and improves operational collaboration. The agreement will mean further clarity for Nigerian nationals coming to the UK and quicker removals of individuals with no legal right to be in the UK. It also touches on further areas of cooperation including combating serious and organised crime.

Further to the above, the agreement we signed with Albania in July 2021, to strengthen the existing arrangements the UK has to remove Albanian nationals who have no right to be in the UK, entered into force in May.

Human Rights of those relocated to Rwanda

You asked about an individual's legal remedy, and enforcement actions open to the UK Government if an individual relocated to Rwanda experiences a human rights breach or discrimination.

I would encourage members of the Committee to read the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United Kingdom and Rwanda, which is available to the public on www.gov.uk. It was negotiated with close care and attention to ensure that assurances were in place to ensure the partnership operated appropriately, with a strong regard to the welfare of those it concerns, and in line with both parties' international obligations. It shows that all asylum claims will be processed in accordance with the UN Refugee Convention, national and international human rights

standards and will ensure protection from inhuman and degrading treatment or being returned to the place people originally fled from. The MoU also includes provision for an independent mechanism to ensure assurances given under the MoU are fulfilled.

The UK Government is confident of Rwanda's commitment to Human Rights. Rwanda is a State Party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the seven core UN Human Rights Conventions. It is recognised globally for its record on welcoming and integrating migrants.

The responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of individuals relocated to Rwanda under the MEDP will sit with the Government of Rwanda. Anyone who wished to seek a remedy for a potential breach of their human rights would do so through the legal and criminal justice system in Rwanda.

Eligibility criteria

You asked about the eligibility criteria when we consider an individual for relocation to Rwanda.

Everyone considered for relocation will be screened and have access to legal advice. I can assure you that nobody will be relocated if it is unsafe or inappropriate for them. The full inadmissibility policy guidance on which relocation decisions are based has been published on gov.uk.

Our own assessment of Rwanda has found it is a fundamentally safe and secure country with a track record of supporting asylum seekers, including working with the UN Refugee Agency which said the country has a safe and protective environment for refugees. We have now published our Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) on Rwanda and its asylum process on gov.uk. These are used by Asylum and Protection decision makers to make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

In addition to the CPINs, we have updated our published Inadmissibility guidance, also published on gov.uk, to make clearer provisions for removals to a safe third country under a model like the MEDP Partnership.

Asylum Operations

You asked for an update on those providing screening of individuals being considered for relocation to Rwanda under our Migration and Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) with Rwanda.

All asylum seekers are screened by officers from the National Asylum Intake Unit. Asylum seekers are considered for potential relocation to Rwanda, in line with our published inadmissibility guidance, following screening. That assessment, alongside

any subsequent decisions on inadmissibility, is undertaken by existing caseworkers. There have been no decision makers recruited specifically because of the MEDP with Rwanda.

You also asked for an update on the asylum work in progress and the number of additional caseworkers recruited since September 2021.

At the end of March 2022, there were 89,344 cases in progress.

Our Asylum Transformation Programme will bring the system back into balance and modernise it. It is focused on increasing productivity by streamlining, simplifying and digitalising processes to speed up decision making to increase efficiency and output. The introduction of specialist Decision Making Units in 2021 has helped with efficiency via building expertise and greater management of cohorts of cases. We have also introduced accelerated decision-making procedures, including shorter interviews and decision templates. We are increasing the use of technology, including improving screening, so that more information is captured as early as possible. From 28 June, measures in the Nationality and Borders Act will allow us to process new claims more efficiently, as well as provide dedicated focus on working through the existing stock of asylum cases under the previous asylum policy.

We have increased the number of decision makers from c.540 to c.840 since September 2021, and anticipate a further increase in the number of decisions per week once they complete their training and following the recruitment of an additional 350 decision makers in the second half of this year.

Afghan nationals in bridging accommodation.

You asked for an update on the number of Afghan nationals in bridging accommodation.

By way of context, Operation Pitting was the largest UK military evacuation since the Second World War, during which we evacuated c.15,000 individuals to the UK. Since the evacuation, a further c. 4,000 individuals have arrived in the UK via neighbouring countries. This is in addition to c.2,000 arrivals under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) between the end of June 2021 and when the evacuation began on 14 August 2021, meaning a total of over 20,000 individuals have arrived in the UK.

Not all arrivals have been placed in bridging accommodation and more than 6,700 people moved, or are in the process of being moved, into new homes since June 2021. Despite the increase in the number of people moving into settled accommodation, the number of people in bridging accommodation has remained steady due to continued arrivals under the Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes and, as of 26 May

2022, there are just over 12,000 living in bridging accommodation. The speed at which people can be moved out of bridging accommodation is, of course, also dependant on offers of accommodation from local authorities.

Training related to Recommendation 6 of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review.

You asked about the Windrush training content in response to Recommendation 6 of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review (WLLR).

Since the Windrush scandal we have launched the Windrush Learning Hub for staff to access materials, resources and external views and perspectives related to recommendations 6, 24 and 29 of the WLLR, including on the history of the Windrush scandal.

We are working with external expert suppliers to develop and implement a training programme for all new and existing Home Office staff on the history of the UK and its relationship with the rest of the world.

The learning package will offer a blend of online learning materials and workshops. The formal elements of the learning were piloted in December 2021, and we are incorporating feedback ahead of the planned roll-out.

In addition, we have hosted events and activities developed by external and internal partners on the organisation's history.

With my very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Tom Pursglove
Minister for Justice and Tackling Illegal Migration